

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Sandra Santimer, 44, lei seller

*"Well, in my grandmother's lei stand, it was just family. We had no outsiders. As far as I could recall, all the way back from Maunakea Street, it was only family for her stand. No outside workers."*

Sandra Santimer, Hawaiian-Chinese-Caucasian, was born to Josephine Pakele and Horace Lewis on October 5, 1941 in Honolulu, O'ahu. She was raised by her grandparents, Rachel and Libert Pakele, on Kahai Street in Kalihi.

She began her education at Pu'uhale School, then went on to Kalākaua Intermediate and finished at Farrington High School.

Santimer's grandmother was a lei seller from the boat day era on the waterfront. In her youth, Santimer helped her grandmother at her lei stands Downtown, on the waterfront, and later at the airport. Following Rachel Pakele's death, Santimer inherited her business at the airport, Rachel's Lei Stand.

On March 21, 1965, she married Earl Santimer. They have three daughters.

Today, Santimer is still the proprietor of Rachel's Lei Stand and owns the house on Kahai Street where she resides with her family. Her oldest daughter, Ku'uipo is now working with her at the lei stand.

Tape No. 14-1-1-85

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sandra Santimer (SS)

September 10, 1985

Mānoa, O'ahu

BY: 'Iwalani Hodges (IH)

IH: This is an interview with Sandra Santimer at Porteus Hall at the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa campus, on September 10, 1985. Interviewer is 'Iwalani Hodges.

Okay, Mrs. Santimer, can you start out by telling us where you were born and when you were born?

SS: I born in Honolulu, Hawai'i, and. . . .

IH: And, yeah, where you were born?

SS: When I was born?

IH: And when you were born, mm hmm [yes].

SS: October 5, 1941.

IH: And who were your parents?

SS: Mr. [Horace] and Mrs. Josephine Lewis.

IH: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

SS: Well, the first marriage, my mother was. . . . Eleven.

IH: Wow, eleven.

SS: Eleven from the first marriage.

IH: Is that your father?

SS: My father, yes. And the second one was three, Cummings. That was the second marriage.

IH: Oh, so a total of fourteen children?

SS: Fourteen children.

IH: Wow, and what number are you?

SS: Number one.

IH: Oh, you the oldest?

SS: I'm the oldest.

IH: But then, you weren't raised by your parents, were you?

SS: I was raised by my grandparents.

IH: Yeah, and what are their names?

SS: Mr. and Mrs. Libert Pakele.

IH: Whereabout did you folks live?

SS: I was, well, born and raised here in Kalihi. That's on Kāhai Street. That's where I was raised up by my grandparents there. From the time from birth until I got married.

IH: Did your mother and the rest of your brothers and sisters live there, also?

SS: No, then, my mother moved up to Lakoloa Street, Kam IV. She had a home there. And then, the rest of my sisters and brothers were raised there, except for me and my oldest brother. I have one brother that's--he's the oldest from all the boys, Horace. So, him and I were raised by my grandparents in Kalihi.

IH: Oh, and who else was raised there with you folks?

SS: We were the only two that were raised there. And then, although I had other aunties and uncles that were there, but they didn't have any children. You see, that's my grandmother's daughters that were living there. And after a while, when they got married, that just left only me. And one aunt. Then, when the husband went back to Germany, she went with her husband. Then that was left only me and my brother with my grandparents there.

IH: What school did you go to?

SS: Farrington High.

IH: Okay. Can you tell us about what your grandmother did for a living?

SS: Well, she was a lei vendor from. . . . Gee. The only year that I could remember was when she was on Maunakea Street. She was there for a while, then she went down to the boat. That would be in the '50s, early '50s. But I think she started being a lei vendor after the war. But probably, I wasn't around that time. But I was born after the war. So, she was working for, like the [Dole] cannery.

Then she went to become a lei vendor at the boat.

IH: Oh, she did have another occupation before . . .

SS: Another, yes. She was working for a cannery for a while.

IH: Oh. Do you know how long she worked for them?

SS: Chee. Not too long for the cannery, but, you see, she was, I would think, maybe about five or six years for cannery. Then she went into being a lei seller at the boat and at Maunakea Street. See, I was maybe about ten [1951], eleven years old, when I was at Maunakea Street with her. When she needed leis like that, I had to run down to the pier and take leis in a box. Whatever leis I had on the board [from which the leis were hung], I had to put it all down in the box, and then take it down to the pier. You know, just have her to sell it. And I just stayed there or go in the [Irwin] Park and play. I just help her put all the leis on her arms.

IH: So you took the leis from Maunakea Street?

SS: Mm hmm [yes].

IH: Did she have a shop on Maunakea Street?

SS: She had a shop on Maunakea Street.

IH: Oh, what was the name of her shop?

SS: She didn't have the name on it. See, most of the lei sellers at Maunakea Street did not have a name for their business.

IH: But they were in a building?

SS: They were outside on the sidewalk in the front of businesses. 'Cause we were located--say, there were about five people there. Three on this side, and two on this side. And we were like, on the corner--like now, they have the post office. Okay, now, this is where we were.

IH: By the post office?

SS: By the post office.

IH: The main post office Downtown?

SS: Not the main post office in town.

IH: The one down Maunakea Street?

SS: I think on Maunakea Street they had one. I don't know if they still have one, but we were there. Used to be a bar. Roseland Cafe, they used to call that. So, we were situated right there. But we knew



all the other lei vendors there, see. And then, I had an aunt named Annie Alana. My grandmother was married to---well, her brother was married to this lady, Annie. And they were right next door to us.

IH: Oh, your grandmother's brother . . .

SS: Brother was married to Annie.

IH: . . . was married to that lady.

SS: Uh huh [yes]. So, they were in business, also.

IH: So they would just have their leis out on the sidewalk? Did you have tables or anything?

SS: We had tables. We had like a long board with nails on it. Then we just put our leis on . . .

IH: Oh, hanging down?

SS: Hang it hanging down. Then we had a little box thing that we put our feet into. (The box was used as a table to put the flowers on top instead of just on your lap. And it covered up our feet 'cause we only wore slippers. Don't look too nice.) And we used box, wooden box, to put our flowers in. We didn't have those cardboard to put our flowers inside, those days. Just [boxes] or, you know, pā kinis. And to wet the leis, we just have water. We had a faucet-like in a lane. Go and get water. And we had our iceboxes in the lane, too. So, we have to go and take, you know, after we close. 'Cause, say, we start about seven o'clock in the morning and we get through about eight, nine o'clock at night. Just put all the leis in the back, lock it all up. Get our bucket water, put it in the front, and wet the leis. Dip it up and down. You know, shake it, and then just put it on our display board.

IH: So, you folks all had iceboxes in the alley?

SS: We did have iceboxes in the alley.

IH: You all had your own separate iceboxes?

SS: Mm hmm [yes].

IH: You brought it down there or was there already?

SS: No, we had to bring it. We had to have someone bring it there. And then, the iceman would come to put ice for our leis. That's the only way we could keep the flowers fresh, you see.

But working down there was. . . . Especially because my mother was working with me, also. And then, we only had one outsider, but he was like a family to us. We used to call him Uncle Billy. He used to help take care the stand, too. You know, 'cause he knew a lot

of people. He's one of the old-timers, too, lei seller. So, lot of people that---well, most of them were people that he knew from in the bar, okay. They come and buy leis from Kauhane's Bar on Kekaulike Street. They used to come all the way to see him just to buy leis, talk story with him. Only but sometimes, he comes to work little bit under the weather, you know, drunk. I used to just tell him, "Better you just stay home already. Go home, rest. You know, 'cause I don't want you give all of Grandma's profit away."

IH: Oh, yeah? Did he do that? Give away a lot of leis?

SS: Sometimes he used to do that. But all in all, he was a good person. And later on, he went down to work for Martina's [Macalino]. That's the only lei stand he worked for until he passed on. Because he used to live in . . .

IH: And what was his name?

SS: I used to call him Uncle Billy, but he had another name. And I can't even think of it right offhand. I can't think of his original name.

IH: Now, when you folks were on Maunakea Street, were you buying your flowers?

SS: Oh, yes. We were buying from the growers.

IH: Okay. And who were the growers?

SS: Well, like Shiraki, Sunabe. Oh, Shiraki delivered plumerias. Shimizu delivered plumerias, also. Then we have orchid people that used to come there--Orchids of Hawai'i, Jimmy Miyasato. He used to furnish us, most of the lei vendors there, flowers.

IH: So, you didn't have any backyard farmers coming down there?

SS: Not too many of them, not too many. Maybe, like my grandma had this lady from Damon Tract. She used to supply us with plumeria leis. And Papakōlea, we have crown flowers; and Nānākuli, crown flowers we used to have. They used to just bring it already strung, so it'd be easier for us just to sell, huh? Especially Boat Days. Just take it straight down to the boat. My grandma would take so much in her pā kini. And then, the rest, if she need any more, then I would. . . . She calls me, you know, from the park. They have telephone booth. Call me to bring some more leis. Bring whatever leis I have because she's sold out.

IH: Oh, so you would stay up at Maunakea Street?

SS: I would stay up at Maunakea . . .

IH: And she would go down to the boat?

SS: . . . while my grandma would go down to the boat. Yeah, and then her daughter, that is Moana Umi, she used to help the mother, too, to go there to sell the leis. See, 'cause I wasn't too much interested in selling leis down at the pier, because lot of them were older people. There's not too many were young ones. They used to all go in the park. All the grandchildren all go in the park and play until the grandparents are all pau for the day for selling all their leis. So when my grandma used to call me and say bring whatever leis you have, that's it. After she sells all, pau, we go home. We go home early.

IH: Did she normally sell all the leis that she took?

SS: Normally, she sold all her leis. And those days were like, chee, you could get even ten for a dollar. That's how cheap the leis were. Really was a tremendous. . . . And you see the amount of leis that all the lei sellers had, and beautiful plumeria leis. You know, they just had all those different colors, natural colors, that would be sold. I mean, they just have 'em in armful of--each one of 'em, down the row. Ten for dollar. You know, the customers bargain with them. Then, before you know, before the boat ready for leave, they want to just get rid of 'em, so they go twenty for dollar.

IH: Wow!

SS: That's it. And they really made--I mean, those days, money were a lot to them, although it was cheap. But every dollar was a dollar to them.

IH: Did all of the lei sellers generally have family working with them?

SS: Mostly family. Most of the lei vendors that I knew were all family. We used to have a lady across the street named Auntie Carrie. So, well, she had her brother working for her. Then she had her sister working for her. So, it was family. This other lady down the road across of my Auntie Annie Alana, Hawaiian lady, she had all her children working for her, in the front of the chop suey house. So, like I say, on Maunakea Street was mostly their own family. We didn't have too many outside people that you have to hire, see, so the money stays within the family.

IH: And were there other nationalities besides Hawaiians?

SS: No. Majority were Hawaiians, those days. Then, we go over to Kekaulike Street, okay. We knew lot of Hawaiian people that sell leis over there. They used to have this Kamehameha Grill, not what it looks like now, but before. Used to be all wooden floor, and wooden chairs, and it looked like a bar thing, but it wasn't, where they used to keep all their glasses, and their plates, and spoons, and all that. And the kitchen was in the back. But they used to have lei sellers, and all Hawaiian people. You didn't see any other nationality but Hawaiians.

IH: Did any of them have lei stands within a building?

SS: Within the building? None of them.

IH: Was all on the sidewalk?

SS: All on the sidewalk, mm hmm [yes]. Until later part, then you had a few, well, that like Cindy's is all inside of the building now. Most of the lei stands are all inside.

IH: Mm hmm, now they're all inside.

SS: All inside. Well, majority of them, the family, generations, they own the building. So, they don't pay the rent.

IH: Are there still Hawaiians down there?

SS: All Chinese people now. Not one Hawaiian. You find majority of the Hawaiians now is at the lei stand, as far as the stall owners. But workers, majority is Filipinos.

IH: Oh, down at the airport?

SS: Down at the airport.

IH: Yeah. So, in the olden days, who were your customers down Maunakea Street and the waterfront?

SS: Chee, lot of local people. And we get a lot of these hapa-Haoles that come by all the time that live here. You know, they were generally our steady customers that always come by to buy leis.

IH: And what did they buy the leis for?

SS: Well, like mostly, they go luaus. Or they have some kind of special anniversary or birthday party. That's what the occasion was for.

IH: Did they ever buy just to wear, or was always for a special occasion?

SS: Well, some of them buy just to wear. Not majority of them, but maybe just a handful of them used to buy just to wear it. Especially those that going in the bar. You know, they like to have a lei on and then buy the leis for the cocktail waitresses.

IH: What did your grandfather do?

SS: My grandfather, well, he used to. . . . Well, he didn't work during the wartime [World War II]. Just used to stay home and babysit all the children, his own.

IH: His own children?

SS: And then, my brother and I that he raised. We were babies. And



then, later on, he went out to work. The only job I could remember that he worked for was Scott Slipper Company (which was located near Kapi'olani Boulevard and Pi'ikoi Street), where he made slippers. He was working there, but I don't know prior to that if he did work when my grandma went to work. But, see, when my grandma went to work, somebody had to stay home and mind the children. So, he had to. You see, then later on, as the years went by and the children all grew big, grew older, then he decided he wanted to get out of the house because he was getting tired of being tied down with all the kids. Then my brother and I grew older, then he went out to work. But just for a little while. He was working, and then when his age for retirement, then he retired. But that's the only job that I could recall.

IH: Did he ever work at the lei stand?

SS: Oh, he used to come once in a while down there to make gingers. Open up the gingers would be really convenient and easy because all I had to do was just string it up. You see, he just peels it open, or he helps strings, you know, when he wants to. He used to help. But most likely, my grandmother didn't want him down at the lei stand. She would rather him just stay home and take care of the kids and cook. Have dinner ready, right? So, she was mostly a businesswoman on her own with her children at the lei stand. Not too much with her husband to come at the shop to help with the business.

IH: Did she do all her own books . . .

SS: No, her book work, no.

IH: Who did that for her?

SS: She had an accountant named Mr. Yap. But he passed on, and then she gave it to Lester Chock, who is a CPA accountant. Then, I carried on after that. When she passed on, I carried off where she left off. Okay, then I took it to this bookkeeper that's doing all my paperwork now. I use the same person.

IH: So, when she was down at the [airport] lei stand, was that all day? How many hours a day would she be down there?

SS: Oh, my God, I would say, it's mostly all day, she'd be down at the shop. Say, maybe eight o'clock in the morning till midnight, one o'clock. She had long hours. Although I used to tell her go home and I can sit for her, but she's a woman that had a one-track mind that her business comes first. You know, she used to say no, don't have to go home. I say, "Go home, take a bath. Lie down, relax. Spend some time with Grandpa. I can stay here and take care of the shop." Maybe she can stay home for couple of hours or maybe whatever, how long she wants to, but her mind and everything was wholeheartedly on her business. You know, although she know I could stay there and take care of it, but she would rather stay at the shop instead of

spending too much time at home.

IH: So, did she take her food with her or did you folks have to drop off?

SS: Well, what I usually do was, my grandfather prepares dinner, then I go home and pick it up. Because she didn't like too much this kind of fast-food restaurants. She liked home cooking. So I go home, pick up whatever he makes. And she likes na'au, and all this tripe, butterfish. Go home, pick it all up, her poi, and take it down. Then she eats it. She sleeps there.

IH: She sleeps there, too?

SS: She sleeps there, sitting on the chair, and putting her head on the table. I told her, "Mommy, I think it's best you go home and sleep. Because how can you sleep like that? Your neck gets all sore." But she's comfortable. I told her, "Better you go home."

But no, she says, "No, I'm all right over here."

I said, "You sure? I can drive you home."

"No, no, no. I'm all right," she says.

She sleeps there. Next day, maybe at one o'clock, two o'clock in the morning, she gets up, okay. Then, I stay with her. Then, I wake her up. I tell her, "Come on, we go home, take a bath already." It was late. We get up. I take her, drive her home. Pau, she wants to come back to the lei stand. I say, "We just stay home and sleep. And then, in the morning, we can go back down there early, open up the shop. Or else, I go open up and you can come down later." No, no, she want to come back with me down the shop. So, it's about three, four o'clock in the morning, right, we going right back to the (chuckles) lei stand. But that's how my grandmother was, a hardworking woman. She is so sincere about her business. I mean, everything around her--everything, it was her business. Plus, she had her children helping her until they all went out on their own. All got married, raised their own families, then that's when she only had me and my brother.

So, my brother and I, like she had accounts for [Kaiser] Hawaiian Village [Hotel]. And I mean, like thousands of leis every day, okay. So, we had to have help.

IH: Is that for the luau or something?

SS: For the luaus, the shows that they had there. So, she had the contract, okay. So, my brother used to come down and help, string up the leis. And I used to deliver all the leis in my car. I had a small Thunderbird, you know.

IH: So, who would string all the leis?

SS: Well, I still had my auntie, my other auntie, that was living here yet. She and her husband. The husband was unemployed. So, my grandmother said, "Okay. We're going to need some help. Because you and I can't do all of this work."

IH: About how many leis would you have to sew?

SS: Chee. Well, see, you need 1,000 leis for this account. Then we need leis for the board [at the lei stand], okay. Then, my mom comes in now. My mom had been a lei vendor all her life. Her and my sisters came to help string. Or else the flowers would go home. I would take the flowers all home; they put it all together. But my mom always did help at the lei stand. She worked side by side with her mother. She's another woman that never stays home. With all her children growing up, they're all going school. They were going to intermediate and high school. She just had the energetic feeling of going to the lei stand all the time to help her mother, you see. So, like I say, it's all a family. It's a family business, actually, with my grandmother and all her own children that helped her with the business. Then came the grandchildren.

IH: Did she have any help in learning the business? Like someone that might have taught her how to do it or something like that?

SS: No.

IH: She just learned on her own?

SS: Learn it on her own, mm hmm [yes].

IH: And so, when you were going to school, how did you work that?

SS: Okay, after school, I would go there. When I'm through at school, say, if school gets through about 2:15 [p.m.]. So, right from school, I go to Maunakea Street first. When they had to break the buildings down and some of the owners didn't want any lei vendors on the street anymore, we moved down to, that was on Lagoon [Drive]. That was the old Ford cars they had those days where we had to use lantern. We didn't have electricity.

IH: That's when you moved from Maunakea Street to Lagoon Drive [in 1952]?

SS: To Lagoon Drive.

IH: And you moved from Maunakea Street because they didn't want you on the sidewalk anymore?

SS: Yeah, they didn't want us on the sidewalk any longer.

IH: That was the shop owners?

SS: The shop owners that we were in the front. They didn't want us there anymore. So, we had to relocate and moved onto. . . . Well,

actually, see, Mama Lily used to be Lily Kahalelio. Now, through her---she had children. She was running this lei stand down on Lagoon Road. Used to be Lily's Lei Stand among all those grass shacks. But prior before that was those Ford cars. She had one of those cars. Then she got sick and she couldn't handle her business anymore. Her daughters didn't want to take care of it. So, her and my grandmother used to be very close companions at the boat. So, just so happened one day, she talked to my grandma that if my grandma would like to take over her business, she would give it to her. 'Cause that time, I don't think the state [territory] took control yet until we moved further up in the grass shacks.

IH: Right. I think on Lagoon Drive was still Damon Estate.

SS: Yeah, Damon Estate. So, before she passed on, [Lily Kahalelio] had given her [SS's grandmother] the lei stand. So, that's how my grandma got into the lei stands at the airport, through this lady. 'Cause she [Lily Kahalelio] had two daughters which did not want to have anything to do with the business. 'Cause they had enough of it before when they were young.

IH: Why couldn't other cars just come over there and open another stand?

SS: Well, they had already, say, about eight of those Ford cars there, and that's it. They only had a limited space for those cars. Because there was homes there. You know, on the corner there was homes. I'm sure they don't want to give out their property for these cars to be blocking their home. So, there was only eight cars that was situated there. So, from there, then we moved up when the state [territory] department [Hawai'i Aeronautics Commission, HAC] decided to open up grass shacks for the lei stands [in 1952]. But they had exceeded more in numbers of lei stands since then. So we had like fifteen lei stands there.

IH: So, that was a different area?

SS: A different area.

IH: Okay, where was the first area, where the cars were?

SS: Okay. Now, there used to be Jet Burger across the street.

IH: Right.

SS: Okay. It was situated right by the corner before that intersection. You know where that South Seas is?

IH: South Seas Restaurant.

SS: Now, past the South Seas, there's those banks, lot of businesses over there. Okay, now, that's where the cars were.

IH: Was right there? Oh, so was right near Nimitz Highway, then?



SS: Nimitz Highway, right. Then, we moved further up on Lagoon [Drive].

IH: Okay, so when you were at the first stand in cars, can you explain a little bit of what that looked like? The stands?

SS: Well, it just was those Ford--it's black, all the black cars. And they had just a wooden (cabinet the size of the back of the Ford car) like going up, down, straight up and down, and then we had the nails on it to hang the leis. Then we used to have to go through the back to get our water that was like a trail. We go in the back. There's no toilet facilities there. You have to go across the street to Jet Burger to use it.

IH: And they didn't mind that?

SS: They didn't mind. They didn't have any lighting for the road. So, we have to use a lantern. All the time, we had to have lantern. You know, at night, especially.

IH: Oh, so you kept the lantern on . . .

SS: For nighttime, yeah. Daytime was no problem, but we used to get the wind, we used to get the rain, and the dust, and everything else there. But we liked it. We liked it.

IH: And where did you get your water from?

SS: Well, there was a little pipe that used to be--I guess, one of those people that owned the property there, they didn't mind to let us, but we would have to pay the water bill. So, we all divided. There was a trail that goes down in the back to get our water so we can keep our flowers fresh.

IH: Did you have icebox in the cars?

SS: Yeah. We had icebox, but not a very big one. You know, just enough. Just like something like the ice cream kind? You just open it and put. Because that car couldn't hold a really big icebox.

IH: You didn't just leave it there?

SS: Yeah, we just left it there. And just lock it.

IH: The cars were left there, too?

SS: And the cars were left there permanently, yeah. Until we were notified by the state [territory] department that they were going to put us in a better place. So, then later on, I guess, my grandmother just took the car away and just put it down where she used to live on a street and left it there.

IH: Do you know why the state [territory] decided to build those grass shacks?

SS: Well, to my understanding is that they felt that the area that we were in wasn't a very suitable place for a lei stand because it's not too Hawaiiana looking--because selling a lei right from the car. So, they wanted something for the tourist attraction. Okay, so this is why. So when we had a meeting with the state [territory] people, they suggested. They showed us the plans, how these stands were going to be built, and how it was going to look. And lot of tourist attraction would be there, too, and lot of space for parking. We would have a stall for each one of us in the back of the lei stand. We could put our big iceboxes inside or outside of the area of the lei stands.

IH: They were actual grass shacks?

SS: Well, actually, grass shacks, just the roofing was, but was wooden frame building.

IH: Just the roofing was that. . . . Was pili grass or was . . .

SS: Pili grass.

IH: Oh, was pili grass?

SS: Pili, mm hmm [yes] [actually, woven coconut leaves]. And they had some kind of net, like a light colored net to hold it down. Was really nice. I mean, that's really Hawaiiana looking, you know. So, that's the reason, more likely, that they wanted us to use a better facility, more Hawaiiana, than what we were in. But we were comfortable where we were, really. But to the state [territory] people, they didn't think we were that much comfortable staying there. Because we didn't have that much good lighting. Because, you know, it's going to weaken your eyes. I mean, you're in a dull. . . . You just have a lamp to work with, you know. But like I say, lot of the old-timers were there, like Mama Sophie [Ventura of Sophia's Lei Stand] and Agnes Makaiwi [of Agnes' Lei Stand]. She was one of the old-timers.

IH: She was on the cars, too?

SS: She was in the cars, too. [Actually, Agnes Makaiwi didn't move to the airport until 1952 when they moved into the grass shacks.] Then she passed on [in 1960], then her daughter took over the business. That's Mrs. Macalino, Martina [now Martina's Lei Stand].

IH: Do you know when you moved from the cars to the grass shacks?

SS: That would be in the late '60s [1952] that we had moved.

IH: How did that change your business?

SS: Well, our business was much better. Was much better than where we

were situated from the beginning. Because even the state [territory] people said that it would change our environment of business if we relocate and go to this area where they're going to put up these lei stands. And business would be better.

IH: They approached you about moving? The lei sellers didn't approach the state [territory], . . .

SS: No. No, the . . .

IH: . . . the state [territory] approached the lei sellers?

SS: Yeah. The state [territory] approached each stall owner, each that had the cars. They approached us by letter, and then in person. We had to have a meeting with them, you know. They suggested something like this. And then, we had to go--see, we weren't paying no rent where we were situated.

IH: On the cars?

SS: On the cars, no. We didn't pay anybody rent. So, before we moved into, we had to decide whether. . . . We move there, we're going to have to pay rent. But how much was it? So, we had to decide if we can afford it, you know. So, my grandmother and I--I went along with her to sit in on the meetings. So, they all voted that they wanted because it was only (twenty) dollars a month.

IH: (Twenty) dollars a month?

SS: (Twenty) dollars a month, that's all the rent was. So, they said it was very affordable as far as these lei stand people. It's affordable. They could meet the kind of payments, so we all decided to go ahead.

IH: So, when you made that move to the grass shacks, did the price of the leis also increase?

SS: Well, it did. It did increase, yeah.

IH: So, at that time, about what were the prices?

SS: Well, I would say, about dollar and a half a lei. Dollar half, two dollars, and three dollars. Three dollars, you can get a nice double carnation for three dollars. Get a nice plumeria for a buck. See, because we'd just buy it off from these people that live in Damon Tract. The leis were so cheap. They're selling, maybe, three, four, for dollar.

IH: They sold you the leis already strung?

SS: Already strung up. Mm hmm [yes]. They sell it to us four for a dollar. Okay, we sell it dollar a lei, so we're ahead, you see.

IH: Oh, yeah. So, what other leis did they make besides plumeria?

- SS: Oh, they had like all kinds. We had tuberose mixed with orchids, plain tuberose, and plumeria mixed with coleus leaves in between. And let's see, carnations, we mixed it also with the plumeria. Maunaloa lei.
- IH: Did you have like pīkakes and mailes?
- SS: Pīkake. We had those leis, yeah. Pīkake, maile, ginger, pakalana.
- IH: And did the small flowers come strung already, like they are today? Like the pakalana and . . .
- SS: It's already, yeah, already made.
- IH: Already strung?
- SS: Pre-made. Already strung.
- IH: Now, do you remember when the lei seller associations were formed? Do you remember anything about that?
- SS: Lei seller associations. Well, they were formed the early '70s [1952] when we were at the Lagoon [Drive]. They were formed there.
- IH: The Airport Lei Sellers Association?
- SS: At the airport. Lei sellers association, airport.
- IH: Were there any associations when you were down Maunakea Street or down the waterfront? [The waterfront lei sellers organized themselves in 1933 into the Hawaiian Lei Sellers Association].
- SS: No, not--was never.
- IH: Wasn't any there?
- SS: No.
- IH: And why was the association formed when you were on Lagoon Drive?
- SS: Well, we had to have some kind of an organization for the simple reason, we were on state [territory] property already. So, when, for instance, every five years or every ten years when our lease was up, it's better if we were organized. Like we have a Board of Directors and all that. And then, plus have an attorney with this organization so that in case anything comes up, we have all the stall owners plus an attorney to back us up. Because otherwise, if we were just self-employed individually and no organization, now the state [territory] could just kick us out anytime they feel like it, you see.
- IH: So, how long were your leases when you first started?
- SS: The lease? Okay, they were like month to month.

IH: Oh, yeah?

SS: Month-to-month kind.

IH: On Lagoon Drive?

SS: On Lagoon Drive. Not like every ten years or every fifteen years. But now, down here at this stand where we are at, it's every five years. So, this year, '85, it's going to be up. The lease is going to be up. So, we don't know what they're going to do. If they're going to increase the rates on our rent, or increase the percentage, we're not sure, see.

IH: So, when you were at your second stand [1962-78], the one prior to the one you're at now, that was also in the terminal?

SS: Well, no. You mean, this, on Lagoon [Drive], you're talking about?

IH: No, the one after Lagoon [Drive].

SS: Okay. After Lagoon [Drive], we still were in the airport.

IH: You were in the terminal?

SS: In the terminal, right.

IH: And at that time, did you have long leases?

SS: No, our leases weren't long. Mm mm [no].

IH: Month-to-month still?

SS: A month-to-month basis. Yeah, month-to-month basis.

IH: That's kind of hard to work that way, isn't it?

SS: It is, yes. But if you wanted to stay in business, that's the only way. You had to abide with the state. Because, see, we were on contract with them.

IH: So, when you folks made that move [in 1962], was it everybody? Did everybody go together?

SS: Everybody went together, yeah.

IH: Did you have to fight for that or was it just automatic?

SS: No, we didn't have to fight for that. It was just automatic thing.

IH: Oh, that's good. And then, when you made this last move [in 1978], was also automatic?

SS: Yeah. Automatic. Everybody moves together.

IH: Did anyone new come in during any of the moves?

SS: No. Not until later part of this year. Early part of this year, Mrs. [Dora] Brown [Martinez of Dora's Lei Stand]. She's the only one that came in. 'Cause we had this other lady that used to be there, Mrs. Lee. She came in last year, then she decided it wasn't worth her while. So, she moved on. That's when Mrs. Brown was on the list. And she moved in, in that slot that's down between Martina's and Gladys.

IH: And how many stands are there now?

SS: There's twelve lei stands.

IH: Were there also twelve at the last stand?

SS: No, there were fifteen.

IH: Oh, there were fifteen. So, when they cut it down three stands, did some people have to get out?

SS: Well, some people had some financial problems. So that's the reason why that they had to give it back to the state.

IH: Oh, that's why it cut down to twelve?

SS: Cut down to twelve because they were in a financial bind. They couldn't operate the business anymore because of financial problems with their business.

IH: How does running the business compare today as compared to before?

SS: Well, I still like the years before than now.

IH: Why is that?

SS: Like before, well, there's no such thing as a flat rate. You know, like rent fee or there's a percentage basis you have to pay. You see, like I say, when we were operating from a car, see, because the monies that we made were all for ourselves. We didn't have to share it and give it to somebody else. It stays within your family. Like now, well, it's a must that we have to because we're on state property now. It's a different story when we have to pay rent, we have to pay 10 percent, and pay your growers. If you don't pay your growers, your growers can report you to the State Department of Transportation. And they're the ones can get on your case and they can close you up. They'll say, "Well, we give you a certain length of time to pay these growers or else you have to move on."

IH: So, is it kind of tough to keep a business going down there?

SS: It's kind of tough to upkeep it today, yes. Not like before. So, I really much appreciate the olden days instead of now, you know. We



could cope with everything before. But nowadays, it's a lot of stress. A lot of stress. Especially being an owner of your own business. Because there are days that's going to be good days, there are days it's going to be hectic. I mean, business going to be so drastic. That's the days when an owner has a lot of stress. Because, you know you not making money. You losing money. And how you going to get money to pay this, pay that. You got to think of all those things, you see. There's so much things on your mind, you know. So, like I say, I prefer before.

IH: I know recently, you had a little bit of trouble with the business where it was getting really hard on you and you had to close.

SS: I closed for a period of three months.

IH: What made you come back to the stand?

SS: Well, my husband was the person that really pushed me to come back and open up the business for the simple reason, he just couldn't see the stand just stay like that. He used to just tell me, "You know, your grandmother worked so hard for this business. And for you to just let it go like this, what's the sense?" He said, "Better you just get back on your feet again. I'll help you if you need help." But, see, there was so much money involved that I have to start all over again. He helped me. Said, "If it's the money you need, I have the money. I'll help you to finance it and open it back up again. And when you're on your feet again and you have some money, you can just pay me slowly, pay me back the money." But see, as of today, he never did ask me for the money. He said, "I just want you to take care of the business. I don't want you to slack anymore like you did before." 'Cause you can lose a lot of customers that way. You know, they just not see your stand open, then they're going to just disappear to other stands, and then there you go. You cannot generate your business anymore. Because I really had the business until I closed the shop. You see, I had it. I had everything in my hands until I just let it go and just didn't care anymore.

IH: Is that because the work was just too much for you?

SS: Too much stress I had, really. Well, with my home life and with the business, running the business, you know, too much here. Too much in my head that I really couldn't talk to my husband at that time. I had to talk to somebody else, not any member of the family. So I had to talk to someone else. So, later on, when this problem came up that I was under pressure like that, then I had to go see a psychiatrist for myself.

IH: Just for, to talk.

SS: Just to talk to somebody. To get all that thing out. You see, I was keeping this thing all in me. Not letting anybody know what the problem was. So, by talking to somebody else, I mean, it was a

relief for me. You know, I felt a relief. Go talk to somebody else, they could hear me out. Because if I talk to my husband, you know, he's just going to kind of jump on me. I just couldn't talk to him anymore, so he suggested I go to a psychiatrist. I said, "Okay." So, when I used to come home, I felt so eased. And he had to give me some medication to keep my cool down, you know.

Then, my husband said, "Well, are you ready to go back to work?"

I said, "Yeah."

Said okay, then, "Your daughter?" She says okay. We had a family meeting at home. "Okay, Ku'uipo, you're going help your mom. Okay, 'cause she's going to need all the help. 'Cause she can't do it by herself."

Then after a while, he didn't have his job, construction was slow. Then he came down to help. Helped me at the business. See, he couldn't come down during graduation this year 'cause he was working in Kona. But whatever money I needed, to pay growers like that . . .

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

IH: Okay, Mrs. Santimer, can you tell me why did your grandmother give her stand to you when she passed away instead of, maybe, to one of her daughters?

SS: Well, she felt that I deserved it. Because like I say, I worked side by side with her. Through rain and sun and everything else, that she felt I deserved to have the business. I mean, although she had her daughters, but we were very close. I did work by her side. Like days that I had to go to school, after school I always did go down to the shop and stayed there till heaven knows what time. After I get through doing my homework, then I string my flowers, working side by side with her. So, I was, say, one of her favorites. I was the favorite one, 'cause I was the first oldest grandchild.

She had lot of children, but in those days, they couldn't give everything to their children 'cause money was small that time. So, the way that I worked side by side with my grandmother, she felt I deserved it. Because I didn't ask for all the things that she gave me. She just asked me. I mean, I put everything on the side, now. I could have gone to proms, I could have gone to football games. But what? I don't go to those things. Why? Because grandma needed the help.

IH: So, you didn't go to any kind of school functions or anything?

SS: Any school functions, activities, no.

IH: Always down at the lei stand?

SS: Always down at the lei stand, seven days. School days and weekends,



always down there with her. Hardly had time to see my friends, you know. In fact, those days, to me, I just go school. My friends were friends in school, that's it. After that, I don't call them up.

IH: So, what did you do when you graduated from high school?

SS: Like I said, I went to help my grandmother. She asked me if I wanted to go college, I told her no. So, she tell me, "Why? If you want to be somebody, make a career of yourself, why don't you go for further education or whatever you want to do?" You know, she'll finance me.

I told her, "No, I want to help you with your business." That was more encouraging to me to help her so I would learn more from her, she being an elderly person. You know, elderly person, you sit down and you watch and observe what they do. This is how you learn. So, I gradually learned how she operate her business.

She even told her children. If one day she's not here, that the business, she would give me the business. Me, the granddaughter. Well, my grandma felt, they [her daughters] had husbands that can support and take care of them. I didn't have. I had a mother and father, but my parents did not raise me. It was my grandparents. So they were responsible for me. So, my grandma says, no, that anything happens to her, that she has this is writing. She has a will.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

IH: Okay, when your grandmother was teaching you the business, did she teach verbally or just by her actions?

SS: Both ways. Verbally and by her actions. She talked to me a lot about her business. But see, I was her moneymaker there.

IH: Why do you say that?

SS: Well, I'm the one that make all the money for her. With all her old-time customers coming to buy lei, I've grown accustomed to their ways and they got used to to me. That Grandma used to be sitting down in the back stringing her flowers and watching TV, and I'd be in the front. So, I was her number one moneymaker there. I mean, I could set up the board, I could make the leis, and just replace the leis back on the board. That's the reason why. So, anything that I wanted, I could have. Because Grandma felt, "Okay, you make the money, no problem, anything you want, you're going to have it." So, that's how she spoiled me in her own way.

Like I had an uncle that was married to one of my grandmother's daughters. And he used to tell me, "You better save your money, you better save your money." And I was single.

"Oh, for what I have to save my money? For what? I might die tomorrow."

He said, "No, that's not the kind attitude you should take. Save your money 'cause one day you going to need it."

But, see, when you're single, you don't think of that. You only think of spending your money. And all my money that I used to get paid on the payroll, I used to buy clothes. That's all I used to buy, clothes. You know, I like to dress nice.

IH: What about down at the waterfront?

SS: Oh, the waterfront days were good. Because you know why? We used to have this policeman, used to call (Phil). Real dark, dark Hawaiian. And used to always have his paddle stick--you know, the stick that they always hold--and used to just hit 'em on top of this. They had to make a line, okay, to keep the lei sellers within on the sidewalk. And then, they had to put up this wooden fence--like that they stay in the back of it, okay. So, when he used to come there, he just used to hit his paddle stick all on top of that fence area there. He says, "Well, are you lei sellers going to sell out today?" And then, while sometimes the customers coming from across the street from the park area, he says, "Come and get your leis over here, ladies. Get all your leis. They got beautiful leis here. Ten for a dollar." And they had lei sellers go inside the [Irwin] Park. But you see, the lei sellers not supposed to run back and forth. If you're assigned in this area, you supposed to stay within. But see, some of them used to go sneak, go across by the park, because the customers parking their car in there, they getting off, right? They want to sell it over there before they reach right by the gate to go in.

IH: You folks were not allowed to sell on the park?

SS: Not supposed to do that. We weren't supposed to do that, rush the customers. And some of these old-time lei sellers used to do that. That guy (Phil), he used to tell them, "I told you how many times you not supposed to do that."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." You know, the old-timers, they said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay (Phil), okay (Phil). I not going do it again."

Then when the boat comes back in again, they doing the same thing. And (Phil) is over there. He says, "You folks like me take you folks in or what? You want me to call the paddy wagon and take you folks in?"

Oh, I tell you, you know, those were the days. But when I used to sit down in the park and I watch that, I just laugh, and laugh, and laugh to myself.

IH: Was he there a long time?

SS: Long time, he's been. He's the one policed the area when the boats come in and the boats leave. He was the only one, one of the old-timers over there. But all the lei sellers, you know, they could cope with him.

IH: Do you know his last name?

SS: No, I don't even know his last name. I only knew him by (Phil). But he was such a . . . Those were the good days, like I say. From Maunakea Street to the pier. And upside on Lagoon [Drive]. I think those were more of a mellow . . .

IH: So, you folks have definite positions on the row of lei stands, don't you?

SS: Oh, yes.

IH: How did you get those positions?

SS: Well, the state sort of had to set us in numbers along the way. Like, for my grandmother's time, they had took us from the very first from where we were located at the cars, doing business at the cars. This is how they have situated us. But there were only eight of us.

IH: So, they put you in the same order?

SS: In the same order.

IH: When they built your grass shacks? And it's always been that same order?

SS: It always has been the same order. See, then they added on nine, ten, eleven, twelve more lei sellers after that, see. So, that's how all these were numbered, how they had numbered us. Then they put names on it. Then we were numbered before we went to the old lei stand, the new one. Now it's only names, now, no numbers.

IH: Oh, before, had numbers?

SS: No, before, the old lei stands, the one was in the terminal? Okay, before we went to this new lei stand now, we had numbers. We had names on the top, but we had numbers, also--you know, each stand. So, this one, they decided to have only names. But see, most of them, when they advertise in the yellow pages, they put the number of the stand. Because some people has an easier time by number. Maybe name, too, but by number. It's the same way with me. Like if

a customer say, "Oh, what stall number are you in?"

I say, "Oh, stall nine. But you look for Rachel's." 'Cause this is the way the sign is. You have to look for Rachel's. Because there's other businesses here along the way that has names on it. So, if they can just view out their points by they know that it's Rachel's.

IH: Okay. When did you get married?

SS: March 21st.

IH: What year?

SS: Nineteen sixty-five.

IH: And what is your husband's name?

SS: Earl Santimer.

IH: How many children do you folks have?

SS: We have three girls.

IH: Oh, all girls.

SS: Three daughters.

IH: And what are their ages?

SS: One is twenty, one is thirteen, and one is seven.

IH: Do they work with you in the lei stand?

SS: Just my oldest one, Ku'uipo.

IH: Has she always worked with you?

SS: She does, yeah.

IH: Does she like the lei business?

SS: Oh, yes.

IH: Do you think that she'll carry on the business?

SS: I think she'll take care of it. She'll carry on the business. Because the other two are too young yet to really know about the business 'cause of their schooling age yet. They don't spend too much time, maybe just weekends they can come down to the shop. 'Cause I have my second girl that likes to play with the register a lot, that one. Not too much stringing. She likes the register. So she always tell me, "Mom, I'm going to work outside when I graduate from school."

I said, "What you going to do when you graduate?"

"Oh, I want to work for McDonalds."

"Why do you want to work for McDonalds? Don't you want to work for the lei stand?"

"I don't like to string leis?"

I said, "Why?"

She said, "I rather go work for McDonalds because I like to play with the register."

That one is not too much--I don't think she's going to be a lei vendor, that one. Like I say, she would rather go out and work. I say, well, that's fine. I won't push the issue to them that they have to carry on. I know, for one thing and for sure, my oldest daughter is the one that will take care of my business for me. She knows the ins and outs of producing--you know, how much flowers to take. 'Cause she's there constantly with me, seven days a week, so she knows. And maybe my second one, she's still young yet, but when she was about five years old, she was at the lei stand helping me, stringing her plumeria lei, opening the gingers, cleaning up, get the dustpan and broom. So, you know, you just have to give them more time 'cause they're young yet.

IH: When you say opening the gingers, what do you mean by that?

SS: They have to stem it [remove the stem] from the bunch ginger. It comes hundred flowers, separate flowers, in a bunch. Then they have to pinch it open, stem it open, individually. Then they have to just open it all up, putting the two ears in the outside of the flower itself. Then, I can string it.

IH: So, you just pinch off the stems and open it up?

SS: The stem, and open it up.

IH: Oh, then you string?

SS: Then I string it. See, it's easier for me. Otherwise, I have to do all of that. So, say, there's about two stages. You have to stem it and open it. Then you string it. But for the other flowers, it's no problem 'cause you're just going to string it. You know, the carnation, you just shred it to make it thick, double. And then, or else, you just poke it right through to string it with the tuberose, to give it some color.

IH: Have lei stringing techniques changed any since before?

SS: Not too much. The technique hasn't changed.



IH: Do you have any different flowers now than you did before?

SS: Well, we have one new flower, that's the protea. That's the one that we use in between combination plumerias, with the leaves, and other orchids in between. That's a new one, new flower, that came out. Then, of course, the ginger, they have the Micronesian ginger lei that they make? Well, that's one of the newest style that they haven't made those before. So, I would think those are the only two.

IH: Did your grandmother design her own leis or try to make different styles and techniques and stuff, or did she just . . .

SS: No, she did the routine thing, common leis, every day. But her son [Libert Pakele] came up with this pattern. They call it "Delphinian." It's a Delphinian lei. And it had white carnations on both sides. You string it sideways, the flower. And you put in between, you can use about anything, roses. You can use baby anthuriums, the real miniature anthuriums. You lay it all one way, though, when you string it, okay. Well, he created something like that.

Then his sister [Moana Umi of Gladys Lei Stand], my aunt, had created this, with the white bozu flowers, she spray painted different colors, like black, orange, blue, green, purple, pink. And she made it with white carnations. You just string it upright, and you're putting these bozus. They're all splattered around like, within the carnations. And that became a very outstanding lei, you know. She used to sell a lot of those.

And her brother used to make a lot of that for her mother. See, the brother was working for the sister, the Gladys Lei Stand. And they had some misunderstanding, so he came back, help his mom. So, he started to make all those patterns, what he made for her, next door. So, those were one of the best-sellers that we had as one of our specialty that we had on the board. 'Cause he used to just make, oh, just beautiful designs on his own. Then, later on, he went. My Uncle Libert, he went onto his own business. Florist business at Salt Lake, he has his shop. Libert's Leis and Florist. You see, 'cause he worked . . .

IH: Did the lei sellers make flower arrangements for like parties and things like that?

SS: No, not too many of us did that. 'Cause they weren't . . .

IH: Strictly lei sellers?

SS: Most are strictly lei sellers. Just in flower leis. Not too much of the arrangement type. But like my Aunt Moana, she knows. And my Aunt Rachel, my grandmother's youngest daughter, she could make a lot of these centerpieces, anything. I mean, you just tell her what you want, she can just fix up one. But she was good in her own way of creating anything. It doesn't matter, I mean, if it's from the

book. She can just sit there. She gets the flowers and just make an arrangement. So, she was working for her brother at Libert's Leis and Florist. Now, she works for Paradise Florist as a florist arranger.

IH: Do you think when tourism fluctuates--sometimes there's a lot of tourists in town, sometimes there is not a lot of tourists in town--does that affect your business a lot?

SS: Oh, it does, yes.

IH: You think that a lot of your business comes from the tourists?

SS: Majority comes from (local people meeting family and friends).

IH: Oh, it does?

SS: Mm hmm [yes].

IH: Is that different than before?

SS: Well, before, mainly was tourists. But right now, as of today, it's our local people. Because like for instance, tourists comes all package deal. So, when they come in, they don't see the lei stands. And even when they leave, they don't really buy leis from us. All depends which way they're going, which direction they're going. They're going home or they're going to Japan way or which way. You see, so they all come package deal. So, we don't really see these people. They come there, they just take picture, and that's it. So, our main people that really buys leis from us and gives us the business is our local people here.

IH: What about military?

SS: Military, they do give us business, too, yeah.

IH: How do the lei prices fluctuate?

SS: Today?

IH: Mm hmm [yes].

SS: Well, they start, generally, from three dollars and up.

IH: Do the prices of the leis change . . .

SS: They go according to season. On the season. Wintertime, say, from November until the opening of spring in March, the prices are up.

IH: Why is that?

SS: Well, because there's less flowers. Our suppliers cannot supply us the amount, you know, our quota. So, there is a drop back on our

flowers.

IH: Do the growers also charge different prices? They have seasonal prices? Do they charge you?

SS: Well, some of them had a seasonal price; some of them is all-year-round price. But see, like, say, for instance, dendrobium [orchid] flowers. Okay, I have a grower that all year round, she sells for three cents a head. Maybe another grower that I have, she sells three cents now. When wintertime comes, she goes four cents. Pikake leis, the same thing, pre-made. Okay, I buy it from my contact for, say, a rope pikake for seven dollars. When comes wintertime, he goes up ten dollars a rope. Because of the season.

IH: For the rope pikakes?

SS: For a rope pikake. Because of the season. That goes much so with carnations and all the other flowers. For instance, we pay four cents now, say, five cents with the freight. So, maybe when comes wintertime, it goes up seven cents a flower.

IH: Per flower?

SS: Per flower.

IH: You not really making that much on each lei . . .

SS: But we make money because it's wintertime now, less flowers, we get our rates. It's a supply and demand that time. The public wants the leis, okay, if they want it, they're going to pay any rate for it. Because everybody down the line is going to hold their price. They are not going to cutthroat you. 'Cause they know, wintertime, we make money.

IH: So, do you folks all have a certain price . . .

SS: Certain price ranges?

IH: Yeah, do you all have to follow the same prices?

SS: No, we don't.

IH: You set your own prices?

SS: We set our own prices.

IH: Are they pretty consistent up and down the stands?

SS: Yeah, everybody. 'Cause if we do that, if we have, they would consider it as fixed price, if everybody had the same price. 'Cause, see, like flowers are very perishable. They can't last forever. So what we do, if we cannot sell. . . . Okay, say, it's a slow day today. We cannot sell at the rate that we want the customer to pay



for it. So, say, I'm selling this dendrobium lei. A plain dendrobium for five dollars. I'm going down three dollars. Why? Because I have so much of them. I still have so much in the icebox. Okay, so although it lasts for a long period of time, dendrobiums, it's no problem. But I just want it moving, because next day, I'm having some more flowers delivered again. You see? Actually, it's up to the individual stall owners on their prices. They set their own prices.

IH: Okay, nowadays, I notice that you folks are able to hire workers to work the stands. So, now it's not just family oriented anymore.

SS: Right.

IH: When did that start?

SS: Golly. Well, that started 1980.

IH: Oh, just on this new stand?

SS: On these new stands, yes.

IH: Oh, on the stands prior to this it was still families?

SS: Well, in my grandmother's lei stand, it was just family. We had no outsiders. As far as I could recall, all the way back from Maunakea Street, it was only family for her stand. No outside workers. But just 1980 when I knew that I had to have some outside help because my children were so young, so I had to hire outside people to come and help me.

IH: And how is that working out?

SS: Oh, it's working out all right. Get one during the day and one during the night. Then when business picks up again, say maybe like graduation time, I'm going to need more people. So, therefore, I just contact the people I have in my book that used to work for me. They not doing anything, they can come down and help me to string, see. 'Cause you're going to need that extra hand, really.

IH: So, these people that you are hiring, are they still mostly Hawaiians?

SS: No, majority is Filipinos.

IH: Why is that?

SS: Well, for reasons of other, because the Filipinos, they have past experience. They used to work, maybe, for Greeters of Hawai'i as a stringer. So, you know, if they have the experience already, it's no sense in me trying to train a new worker because it's going to take a while before they really can sit in the front to do general everything. So, normally, I don't hire inexperienced people. They have to have an experience, either they worked at a flower shop or

they worked at one of the lei stands before, or worked for Greeters of Hawai'i or some other business that's handling that has to do with flowers.

Like I had one occasion that I had to put in an ad in the newspaper, and I got a lot of calls, and I had a lot of interviews with lot of these people. And they were not only Filipinos. Portuguese, you know. I had two Hawaiian ladies, but only that two of them had a lot of children of stepladder age, and they live so far. They just couldn't, you know. I says, "Well, I would hire you just to string in the back. You wouldn't have to do any selling or handle money." But they said they'd like to stay a little longer but they can't because they're having hard time to get babysitters. So, they could work maybe twice a week and that's it. But I told them, "I need a worker that works five days and two days off." They said, gee, they would be so glad if they could. But they have hard time to get a babysitter. So, I just had to just let them go, and get a dependable worker that can work the hours that I want them to work. So, majority of them were Filipino workers.

IH: So, they're more dependable, Filipinos?

SS: They're more dependable. I mean, I would like to have a dependable Hawaiian if I could. But I just can't find any. Most of them are Filipinos. Because, you see, where we working, when you're in the front, it's nice to stop to see a Hawaiian gal there, right, selling and stringing. But you just can't get that kind of help anymore. And my oldest daughter doesn't want to go in the front and sell. She would rather sit in the back and produce. Unless the days are really, really slow and the girl is not hustling in the front there, calling customers. Then she has to go in the front and help. Otherwise, she's always in the back with me.

IH: Does she enjoy stringing the leis?

SS: Oh, she does. Yeah, she does. That's one thing that she has so much interest in. 'Cause it's hard to find children that you could really bear with them and that they could really stay onto something like this. Just sit all day to just string continuously. But she knows that I need the help. And she's living with me, see. She had moved out some years ago. She still has her apartment that she pays \$170 a month, but she still stays with me. So, the father suggest that, well, instead of her just staying home because if she stay home, clean house, do everything the same routine, she might as well come to the lei stand. I said, "You can bring the baby, it's no problem." Now, she's the only little one that's running around. Everybody in school now. (Laughs)

IH: So, in the summertime, do you have a lot of children down there?

SS: Oh, summertime, all these workers. Next door, Gladys Lei Stand, she have lot of workers that have children or grandchildren. All the kids. But you see, they only stay in the back. See, they are told

not to go in the front and obstruct traffic in the front because there's customers with car. Sometime you don't know one come and just climb that curbing and hit one of them. So, we tell them, the kids, "You folks want to play, stay in the back. We don't want you folks in the front there. Look out, you folks going get spanking." Oh, I tell you. But we have a lot of kids during the summer. It's nice to hear kids running around, really. It's not boring, because you stay there, sit there every day, right? But my oldest one, she's a biggest help to me, my oldest daughter Ku'uipo. 'Cause she's the one can really produce my leis for me.

IH: Do you enjoy the lei business?

SS: I do, I do. But what's the sense of just staying home? Although, like I say, I'm the owner of the business, I don't have to go down there and work. But I rather go. I rather stay at my business, really, instead of staying home. You know, 'cause some people, I guess like some stall owners there, they just come in, check up, get the money, pau, go home. They don't stay there all day. But I don't feel that way. Because I feel I should be there. Because I'm there for a reason, for my customers. When they call, I'm there. Okay, I answer the phone. And for my workers, when they need change, I'm there. I don't want to see them running around other people's stands for change. Because I don't want the other workers to do the same and come to my stand and ask for change. So, that's the reason, more so, I have to stay there. Until certain time, when the next shift workers comes in, that's when I leave. Say, maybe three o'clock in the afternoon, go home. Then the stand can take care itself. Only thing, I just call and just see that maybe once in a while call up, "How's business?"

"Oh, but it's so slow."

I said, "Well, you know you have to put up with the good and the bad." I says, "It's going to be like that for a while. But later on, it's going to pick up."

"Oh, but it's so slow, Sandy."

I have one little Filipino worker. She always tell me, "Oh, Sandy, it's terrible." She said, "But I never make too much money for you."

I said, "Well, you have to understand. You can't have all the good days." 'Cause she used to make like \$300 every day for me on her shift nighttime. Profit, \$300. See, but when it came slow and she only made a \$100-something, she think it was really bad what she did and she felt like quitting. I says, "No, no, no, don't feel that way." I said, "If there's anybody should feel bad, it's me. Okay? Because I'm the one that gotta put up with all the bills. So don't feel bad." I told her, "Just be patient for a while. 'Cause the good days gonna come." But she's so sensitive, this little Filipino worker that I have. Very sensitive, but she's very nice. The

husband in the military, in the navy. They get this kind wives, they go, what, coffee breaks or what they have?

IH: I don't know.

SS: They have this kind coffee. . . . Oh, they go to the neighbor's homes, and they sit down. They all have coffee, all talk story, all gossip. She said, oh, that's not for her. She rather go work. "Make money," she said.

IH: (Chuckles) Make money.

SS: Yeah, make money. So her husband was away for six months. And then, he came back. Oh, he was all around. Japan, he went to Okinawa, you know on a sub, Westpac. So when he came in, the husband had brought, you know those blankets? Not Korean blankets. What do you call that? It's like a quilt. But he had brought some back. And she gave two, one for my daughter Ipo and one for me. I said, "Ey, I didn't ask for this."

She said, "Never mind. My husband brought twelve all back. What I going do with twelve of 'em? Oh, I only have four bedrooms, you know."

(Laughter)

SS: She got two sons. But she's a good worker. When she comes in, she comes straight inside, put her bag down and everything. Go look for her flowers, check up her cash register, and she sits and strings. She never walks around. She's never on the telephone. So, all my other workers, I instruct them the same way. I tell them, "No personal calls unless it's an emergency. Because this phone has to be open for my business." But see, after I leave, I don't know what happens, right? Maybe they're on my phone. Like I have one that she does Tupperware, she sells, pots and pans ware. One night, I wen try to call her. My phone was busy, busy, busy. Oh, I was getting so upset 'cause I wanted to tell her something, was important. I couldn't get ahold of her. I called the neighbor. I said, "Could you go over to my stand and see if my worker is on the telephone. I'm trying to get through and I can't get through to her." So the worker did. I called her up. "And who were you talking to on the phone?" I scolded her.

She said, "I had to talk to one lady about one order."

I said, "No, you was talking about your pots and pans business. You better cut it out, eh? Don't you lie to me." She's older person, about say in her fifties, you know. But, oh, she always like tell tales.

So, my daughter, sometimes, she say, "Mommy, you always backing up her, eh?"

I said, "No, I don't back up any of my workers." Okay, what is good for one is good for the rest. One who get scolding--if I see something wrong, I'm going to tell them then and there. I'm not going to beat around the bush, 'cause I don't do that with the workers over there. If I see something, there's an error, I'll tell them. But my daughter, sometime she like jump the gun and she like tell 'em. I said, "It's how you're telling them, Ku'uipo. You know how you talk to them, you cannot just come out and just like charge them like that. Because these Filipino workers are sensitive people. You cannot talk. You got to talk nice to them."

"Talk nice? Ma, you're paying them. You mean to say, you going pay them and you got to talk nice to them to scold 'em?"

(SS sighs.) I said, "No, Kuuipo, you cannot do that. We're going to lose workers like that."

IH: But that's part of the business, too.

SS: It's part of the business, yeah.

IH: Uh huh [yes], that is part of the business. Well, she'll learn as she stays with you. Just like you learned from your grandmother.

SS: I learned from my grandmother, right.

IH: Okay. Did you folks, when you were living in Kalihi, ever have to string leis at home?

SS: Oh, not too. . . . Well, we did on occasions like when Grandma had big orders like that. The flowers used to. . . . She used to have a big patio. So, we all did string flowers at home, and then take it, deliver it.

IH: But most of the stringing was done down at Maunakea Street . . .

SS: Down at, yeah, Maunakea Street. Yeah.

IH: Okay, I think that's it unless you'd like to add something else.

SS: I guess that's all I have to say.

IH: Okay, thank you very much.

SS: Okay, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

# **KA PO'E KAU LEI**

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**Social Science Research Institute**

**University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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